

Legislature hears Koop call for early education on AIDS

By Teresa Watanabe
Mercury News Sacramento Bureau

SACRAMENTO — U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop on Thursday backed down from his controversial call to begin AIDS education as early as kindergarten, saying the resulting furor had impeded his ability to "get down to the basics and get the job done." But Koop, insisting that education remained the chief weapon against the lethal disease, endorsed a sweeping plan to distribute his AIDS report to every American household.

He also called for vigorous efforts to reach blacks and Hispanics, who are falling victim to the disease in disproportionate numbers.

Koop, the nation's top health official, was joined by Nobel laureate David Baltimore of the National Academy of Sciences in addressing a joint session of the Legislature. Their speeches coincided with the introduction of a landmark bill by Assemblyman Art Agnos, D-San Francisco, that would lay out the state's first comprehensive policy on AIDS.

In somber remarks laced with humor and pathos, Koop lauded the state's compassion and innovation in confronting the disease — and reminded people why AIDS

has so fiercely gripped the California public's attention.

"As I stand in this chamber, I am most mindful of the following single, overwhelming and profoundly tragic fact: That Californians were the first of our citizens, back in June of 1981, to be identified as being the victims of AIDS. They were among the first to die of the disease," Koop told the hushed audience.

"And before the rest of our country knew about — or truly understood the nature of — this catastrophe, the people of California were already beginning to bury their dead.

"I am deeply, deeply sorry that anyone — here or anywhere in the world — has had to die of this disease," Koop said. "And I am especially sorry that the people of this state have had to live with this grief the longest."

The irony of Koop's crusade against AIDS was illustrated after his address, when he won a standing ovation from all lawmakers except Sen. John Doolittle, R-Sacramento. Although Koop is cut from the same moralistic cloth as Doolittle on such issues as abortion and family values, he has ended up pleasing liberals and enraging conservatives with his advocacy of condom advertising, AIDS educa-

tion in schools and voluntary, rather than mandatory, testing.

"I think it's appalling that we have this lackluster and weak response to AIDS, as articulated by the surgeon general and Dr. Baltimore," Doolittle fumed. "We have the president's chief health official being paraded around by the chief political spokesman for the homosexual community — I don't think Ronald Reagan would be pleased." In his speech, Koop dwelled on the need for frank talk in educating children. He lectured legislators about the need for a "faithful and monogamous relationship," saying that "a relationship devoid of love and responsibility is like a piece of pie that's all crust and no filling."

And he urged compassion toward victims faced with the "overwhelming burden" of knowing they have AIDS and will die.

Baltimore went further, cautioning people against the excesses that led to McCarthyism and the internment of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast during World War II.

He also urged that officials recognize the inevitability of drug abuse and casual sex and take such anti-AIDS actions as providing sterile needles to drug users and

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condom dispensers in every restroom for both women and men.

"There is an unfortunate tendency for people to approach the AIDS problem as if a return to imagined Victorian values was a solution," said Baltimore, who called for an annual budget of \$2 billion in his AIDS report for the academy.

Both men rejected mandatory testing for AIDS or quarantining of victims. They also were careful

not to criticize either President Reagan or Gov. George Deukmejian for their response to the crisis. Koop, disclosing that he has never met with Reagan to discuss AIDS, said only that he hoped the president "might be more forthcoming" about a response.

Reagan has publicly mentioned the disease only once in six years.

Deukmejian, who vetoed an anti-discrimination bill last year and has been criticized for deleting AIDS funding, met briefly with

both men after the address in what Koop described as a "cordial" meeting.

In a news conference after his address, Koop said he still favored early education about AIDS, beginning in kindergarten, but would back off from that as a formal recommendation because of the furor it created. He now would recommend that AIDS education begin sometime during elementary school.



CRISIS — Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, right, discusses AIDS crisis at news conference with Nobel laureate David Baltimore, left, and Assemblyman Art Agnos, D-San Francisco.

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